



Aristotle on the Soul

Overview

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The Soul

- Hominimity of 'Living'

- Soul as form

- Against physicalism

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- The general argument for the matter/form distinction:
 - P_1 Change is only possible if there is matter and form.
 - P_2 Change is possible.
 - \therefore There is matter and form.
- Matter is what underlies change in the acquisition or loss of a form.
- Substantial form: acquired by matter in generation; it makes the thing what it is.
- Thus, a thing cannot lose its substantial form — if it does, then it ceases to exist.

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- generation



- existential 'to be'



- matter + substantial form
- E.g.: a new oak-tree; a statue

- qualitative change



- predicative 'to be'



- substance + accidental form
- E.g.: an apple changing color

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The Four Causes

In order to explain something (e.g., why a house exists), we can give several different accounts:

- ① **Material cause:** the matter out of which the thing is made
- ② **Formal cause:** the substantial form of the thing
- ③ **Efficient cause:** the agent that brought the thing about
- ④ **Final cause:** explains *why* the agent brought the thing about.



- material cause: the bricks and mortar
- formal cause: the floorplan
- efficient cause: the builder
- final cause: to provide shelter

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'Living' is Said Homonymously

- all living things have nutrition (“the first and most common capacity of soul, in virtue of which life belongs to all living things” 415a24—25). → **having a soul = being alive.**
- this does not mean that all living things have the same capacities of their souls
- does not mean that we can *always* decide whether something is living or not (e.g., computer virus, AI, or laboratory compounds, etc.)
- in fact, Aristotle thinks we cannot give a “definition” of life, in the sense of expressing one essence.

“**Life is said in many ways**”: core-dependent homonymy (cf. ‘healthy’):

- ① non-univocity
- ② non-accidental connection
- ③ core dependence

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'Living' is Said Homonymously

- ① For living things, to be is to be alive.
- ② Therefore, for any given living thing, its essence is identical with its being alive.
- ③ The essence of Socrates is not the same as the essence of a crab-apple tree.
- ④ Therefore, Socrates's being alive is not the same as a crab-apple tree's being alive.
- ⑤ Therefore, 'life' is non-univocal as applied to Socrates and a tree.

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4 Causes Applied

- Since all this is required to explain the existence of every object, it also applies to humans.
- So, what are the 4 kinds of explanation (causes) we can give of a human being?
 - ① The efficient cause: the parents
 - ② The matter: the body
 - ③ The final cause: well-being
 - ④ But what is the form?

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The Form of a Human Being

The question: **What makes a human a human?**

- In order to be a human being, one needs to be *alive*.
- What makes something alive is its **soul**.
- This same applies to all animals and plants too (they are living beings); however, they have different kinds of souls.

The three parts of the soul:

- 1 Vegetative soul: nutrition — humans, animals, plants
- 2 Sensitive soul: sensation, movement — humans, animals
- 3 Rational soul: reason, will — humans

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The Form of a Human Being: Soul

- what makes the thing what it is, is its substantial form
- what makes a human *a human* is its tripartite soul
- “The soul must, then, be substance *qua* form of a natural body which has life potentially.” (412a19–22)

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The Soul as the Principle of Life

De An. 415b8–14

“The soul is the cause and first principle of the living body. But these are so spoken of in many ways, and similarly, the soul is cause in the three ways distinguished; for the soul is (i) cause as being that from which the movement is itself derived [= efficient cause], (ii) as that for the sake of which it occurs [= final cause], and (iii) as the essence of bodies which are ensouled [=formal cause].”

Remaining questions: Is the soul something purely physical? Can it exist without the body?

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Aristotle Against Physicalism

2 arguments against physicalism:

- 1 We cannot explain everything by matter alone.

De An. 416a9–19

“Some think that it is the nature of fire which is the cause quite simply of nourishment and growth. . . . It is in a way a contributory cause, but not the cause simply; rather it is the soul which is this. For the growth of fire is unlimited while there is something to be burnt, but in all things which are naturally constituted there is a limit and a proportion both for size and for growth; and these belong to soul, but not to fire, and to principle rather than matter.”

- Thus, material systems have features that cannot be explained by the properties of matter alone: e.g., limited and patterned growth.
- These must be explained by reference to something else, namely the form (structure) of the thing.

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2 arguments against physicalism:

- ② It would lead to a vicious infinite regress.
 - Question: if material substances are mere aggregates of material parts, then what holds these material parts together?
 - If they are held together by something immaterial, then materialism (physicalism) is false.
 - If they are held together by some material element, then how is *this* material element united to the body?
 - The only way out: the parts are united by a formal element (in case of a living body, a soul).

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Aristotle Against Dualism

- Aristotle's rejection of physicalism does not commit him to dualism: the dualist affirms that the two kinds of substances can exist apart from one another, while Aristotle denies that.

De An. 412b7–9

“Hence too we should not ask whether the soul and body are one, any more than whether the wax and the impression are one, or in general whether the matter of each thing and that of which it is the matter are one.”



- Here: matter is the wax; form is the shape of the seal
- But the shape cannot exist separately from the wax (or similarly, the wax cannot exist separately from *any* shape)
- The same applies to human beings.

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The Soul — Summary

- Soul : Body = Form : Matter; the composite is the human being
- Rejection of physicalism: we need some formal principle in explanation
- Rejection of dualism: the two (matter and form) cannot exist separately
- Side note: for human beings, it is a little more complicated — their rational soul can exist apart from the body, although not as a substance.

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A Problem?

An unensouled body is only homonymously a body! (412b10–21)

→ a dead body is not properly a body at all.

- this seems counterintuitive!
- the “homonymy-problem”: if the soul is the form of the body, then the body is only contingently ensouled (cf. the statue and bronze); yet if a body is a body only when ensouled, then the body is not contingently but essentially ensouled.
- In other words: is the form needed in order to give identity to the matter? – perhaps, in simple cases (statues, . . .) not; but the notion of form here seems more complex.

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